CITIZENS FORUM, INC.
RECORDS, 1962-1985

Collection #
M 0425
CT 0704-0712

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Processed by
Sally Carr Childs-Helton
June 1985

COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION: 12 manuscript boxes, 10 audiocassette tapes, photographs, and artifacts.

COLLECTION DATES: 1962-1985

PROVENANCE: Gift of Mattie Coney, Indianapolis, Indiana, June 1985

RESTRICTIONS: None

REPRODUCTION RIGHTS: Permission to reproduce or publish material in this collection must be obtained in writing from the Indiana Historical Society

ALTERNATE FORMATS: None

OTHER FINDING AIDS: None

RELATED HOLDINGS:

ACCESSION NUMBER: 1985.0616

NOTES: Acquired through the Black Women in the Middle West Project

HISTORICAL SKETCH
Citizens Forum was founded in Indianapolis in the fall of 1964 by Mattie Coney. It began as a citizens' group that organized for the purpose of getting an open housing ordinance passed. Originating as a "Better Neighbor Program," Citizens Forum expanded into an interracial, interfaith, nonpolitical organization. Its goals included improved health, safety and beauty of neighborhoods, and sought to instill a sense of responsibility, pride, and good conduct and citizenship. Mattie Coney, a retired school teacher, became the group's executive director; her husband, Elmo Coney, quit his job in order to become the projects director. The Coneys provided the organization with the guidance and impetus needed to insure its success for twenty years.

As a grass-roots neighborhood rehabilitation self-help program, Citizens Forum aided in the formation of block clubs that were the core of the organization. Through these block clubs, various programs were carried out, including the following: De-RAT-ification Campaign; Dogwood Tree Caravan; Beautification Awards; Concerts in the Parks; Adopt-A-Park; and Rake-A-Thons. The Helping Hand Program, begun in 1973, was the most widely successful program, spreading to other Indiana cities and towns and to other states as well. It provided "safe" houses in an emergency for children on their way to and from school, and for adults as well.

The organization also provided a major service to its constituent block clubs by providing a channel through which complaints about neighborhood health and safety could be passed on to the appropriate city authorities. The Complaint Assistance/Referral Program aided many block clubs in gaining improved services from public agencies.

Citizens Forum provided community education on a variety of topics, including home and neighborhood health and safety. Through newsletters, newspaper articles, the "Citizens Forum Says" weekly television program and speeches to block clubs, churches, schools, civic and labor groups and other organizations, Citizens Forum spread its campaigns and programs throughout Indianapolis and beyond.

Mattie and Elmo Coney, along with Citizens Forum, gained nationwide attention, and received numerous local, state and national awards for excellence. Other large cities, including Detroit, Milwaukee, Chicago, New York, New Orleans and Washington, D.C. all began programs patterned after Citizens Forum.

Citizens Forum disbanded in 1984 because of financial difficulties, and was not continued due to the death of Elmo Coney and the failing health of Mattie Coney.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

This collection, in 12 manuscript boxes, contains a wide range of materials from the organization. The sample is fairly complete, and contains all of the records held by the organization at the time of its disincorporation. Generally, records from the last 10 years of the Forum's existence (ca. 1974-1984) are the most complete, with considerably fewer materials from ca. 1964 to 1973. Many items are undated.

Part 1 of the collection contains organizational, business and financial records which vary in completeness. Correspondence, in Box 1 (folders 1-15) includes correspondence to Mattie Coney (kept separate from other Citizens Forum records by Mattie Coney) and general business correspondence, as well as letters of support. Correspondence dates from 1962 to 1985.

Box 1 (folders 16-37) contains organizational and business records (1964-1984) consisting of articles of incorporation, constitution and by-laws, feasibility studies for the continuation of the organization, insurance policies, and inventories. These records seem to be fairly complete.

Officer and Board of Directors materials (1964-1984), in Box 2, are fairly complete from ca. 1975-1984, and include officer lists, minutes, and reports. However, they are far from complete in that much material is missing.

Financial materials (1973-1984), in Box 2, are very incomplete; most range from 1982 to 1984 and include check carbons, financial reports and budgets, and tax exemption materials. This lack of financial materials may be due to the non-profit status of the organization; other financial materials may be found in the Board of Directors reports, and with
the grants, foundations and fund raising materials.

Box 2 (folders 19-30) contains foundation and grant materials (1973-1984); these are fairly complete, and most are from ca. 1978-1984. Included are applications to various agencies and organizations, as well as correspondence. Also included in Box 3 are extensive materials from the Neighborhood Assistance Program (1976-1984) and general fund raising correspondence and other materials. Missing are records concerning grants and fund raising from about the first 10 years of the Forum's existence.

Employee and volunteer materials in Box 3 (folders 14-31) (1975-1984) contain employee daily task sheets which give a good overview of the Forum's daily operations. Also included are personnel policies, job descriptions, and materials from the Summer Youth Work Program and from the American Association of Retired Persons Senior Community Service Employment Program. Related to the above are Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) records (1978-1981) in Box 4, which contain grant materials and financial audits.


Newsletters in Box 4 (folders 26-33) and 5 contain file cards in original order of block club records (1984) and files from the public relations department (ND) listing contact persons at various organizations and offices.

Miscellaneous printed materials in Boxes 5 (folders 17-18) and 6 (1962-1984) include historical information on the Forum (from the original file), and information on the Coneys. Also included are flyers and handouts, editorials, Congressional Record articles, award certificates, speeches, and an early scrapbook.


Boxes 7-9 contain block club records arranged alphabetically by block club name. These records vary in completeness depending on the block club, but on the whole are incomplete. Included are membership lists, minutes, correspondence, meeting and activities notices, etc. Boxes 8-9 hold shorter records (10 items or less) for 91 block clubs, also arranged alphabetically by name.

The remainder of the collection is made up of programs and activities records of Citizens Forum and related organizations. Part 3 is comprised of the Helping Hand program records (1968-1984), and are in Boxes 9-10. Box 9 (folders 13-30) contains general information such as introductory materials, visual aids, letters and memos, fund raising materials, lists of schools, principals and superintendents, etc., and program statistics. Boxes 9-10 hold records from Indianapolis schools, both public and private. Most schools are represented, with the bulk of the records coming from 1973-1981. Box 10 contains in- and out-of-state records, 1971-1983. These are arranged alphabetically, and represent some of the programs modeled on the Indianapolis Helping Hand program. Again, all school records vary in completeness, depending on the school.

Following in Boxes 11-12 are other Forum programs and activities, and programs and activities of related organizations. Box 11 contains Forum activities. Box 11 includes materials from the De-RAT-ification Campaign, the Dogwood Tree Caravan, the Improving the Citizenship of Children program and the Beautification program materials, the One Step Further Campaign, Clean Up America/Indianapolis programs, School Clean-Up program, Rake-A-Thon, You Can Do It program, Adopt-A-Park, Concerts in the Park, and Visit Your Neighbor Month programs. Box 11 also holds the Ministerial Advisory Council and Spiritual Education program records, materials from the Forum's television and radio programs, and banquet materials.

Box 12 contains programs and activities from related organizations (1964-1984), and include local and national groups from the public and private sector. These records represent the many organizations with which the Forum worked and
was affiliated.

Part 4 of the collection is made up of 10 audio cassette tapes (1982-1983; ND-CT 704-712). These tapes contain Citizens Forum radio programs and presentations, a speech by Mattie Coney, board and block club meetings, various speakers, and the tape to accompany the Havoc rodenticide slide show.

Part 5 is items removed from the collection, including audio-visual materials (slides, video tapes, film), photographs (black and white and color) and artifacts. The audio-visual materials were used in the many educational programs sponsored by the Forum, and the photographs document the organization's many activities.

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**BOX AND FOLDER LIST**

**Part 1: Organizational, Business and Financial Records**

**BOX 1: Correspondence, 1962-1985, ND; Organizational and Business Records, 1969-1984, ND**

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4 Board of Directors-Minutes-1975-1984

5 Board of Directors-Meeting Agendas-1975-1984; ND

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Part 3: Programs and Activities Records
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<td>De-RAT-ification Campaign-Script for Slide Show &quot;How to Use Havoc Rodenticide&quot;-1982</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Dogwood Tree Caravan-Programs, Letters, Flyers, News Releases, etc.-1973-1980</td>
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<td>Dogwood Tree Caravan-As Above-1980-1982</td>
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<td>Dogwood Tree Caravan-Irvington Forestry Foundation 1983-1984</td>
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<td>Improving the Citizenship of Children Program-Letters, Handouts, flyers, etc.-ND</td>
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<td>Citizenship Materials and Miscellaneous-1966-1969; ND</td>
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<td>Beautification Awards Nominations-1975; 1979; 1983</td>
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<td>How-To-Do Kits Distribution Lists-ND Beautification Awardees Lists and Correspondence-1974-1975; ND</td>
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<td>Visit Your Neighbor Month Program-1973-1975; ND</td>
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24 Ministerial Advisory Council and Spiritual Education Program-1980; ND
25 "Citizens Forum Says" TV Program, WTTV Channel 4-1972-1983
26 "Focus on Citizens Forum" Radio Program, WBRI-1981
27 Miscellaneous Awards Lists-1969-1978
28 Banquet Materials-1965-1975
29 How-To-Do Kits Distribution Lists-ND Banquet Materials-1976

Box 12: Programs and Activities-Related Organizations, 1964-1984, ND

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<td>Marion County Health Department-Bureau of Environmental Health-1983</td>
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<td>Metropolitan Area Citizens Organization-List of Street Improvements Submitted to the Department of Transportation 1984</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Neighborhood Development Program, City of Indianapolis-Neighborhood Profile Questionnaire-1981</td>
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<td>Greater Indianapolis Progress Committee-Minutes-1973-1975</td>
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<td>Indianapolis Bicentennial Committee-Minutes and Project Lists-1974-1975</td>
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<td>Freedoms Foundation at Valley Forge-1966-1973</td>
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Unified Neighbors Newsletter-1982-1983

**Part 4: Audio Cassette Tapes**

Folder 30: Audio Cassette Tapes, 1982-1983; ND

CT 0704-Havoc rodenticide "Technical Show," ICI Americas AG Chemical Division

CT 0705-Citizens Forum radio program Helping Hand Program-"Hooks-Jim Rogers"-2 tapes

CT 0706-WRBI radio program. Side 1: Mrs. Zadia Thompson, Vice-President, Golden Hill Block Club, 5-8-1982; Side 2: William H. Richardson, 5-15-1982

CT 0707-Speech by Mattie Coney, "My Hopes for America's Future," Rotary Club-Athletic Club, 1-26-1982

CT 0708-Board Meeting, 6-8-1983

CT 0709-Side 1: #1 34th and Graceland meeting, 10-5-1983; Side 2: #2 (no title)

CT 0710-Side 1: #3 Richard Crum; Side 2: #4 Richard Crum

CT 0711-Side 1: Russ Leonard and Marie Harmon; Side 2: Greater Indianapolis Program

CT 0712-Marv T. Elliott

**Part 5: Items Stored in Other Collections Areas**

Photographs

Audio-Visual Materials (slides, video tapes, film)

Artifacts (buttons, ribbon)
CATALOGING INFORMATION

For additional information on this collection, including a list of subject headings that may lead you to related materials:

1. Go to the Indiana Historical Society's [online catalog](#)
2. Click on the "Local Catalog" icon.
3. Search for the collection by its call number, using the letter or letters designation and **four** digits (e.g., M 0715, SC 2234).
4. When you find the collection, go to the "Holdings" screen for a list of headings that can be searched for related materials.

END